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Commissioner's Community Award of Excellence Presented to Marquette University and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

*Annual award highlights unique 30-year partnership in influenza
surveillance with local universities in Milwaukee*

MILWAUKEE—Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker presented the annual Commissioner's Community Award of Excellence to Marquette University (MU) and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) today at the UWM Flu Pandemic Seminar. The event was attended by several local area colleges and universities eager to learn more about the community's role and responsibilities in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The Commissioner's Community Award of Excellence recognizes the City of Milwaukee Health Department's (MHD) community partner who has made the most outstanding contribution to public health in Milwaukee during the calendar year of 2005. MHD employees nominate programs or events with community partners that have strengthened public health capacity through their collaboration with the MHD.

"What set this partnership apart from the other nominations was the long-term impact this program has had on the citizens of Milwaukee," said Commissioner Baker. "Influenza is a deadly disease which accounts for 36,000 fatalities in the U.S. each year, and more than 200,000 hospitalizations."

The Commissioner's Community Award of Excellence recognizes the long-standing partnership between the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) and student health services at MU and UWM – a partnership which was initiated in 1972 by MHD Chief Virologist Dr. Gerald Sedmak. Over the past 30 plus years both university student health services have collected throat cultures from students with respiratory illnesses and submitted these samples to the MHD Virus Laboratory for virus culture testing.

"This program has been useful in establishing which respiratory viruses are circulating in the Milwaukee community," said Dr. Gerald Sedmak. "For many years, the first influenza viruses detected in the Milwaukee area and at times the first in the state - have been isolated from MU and UWM samples." The data is also part of the MHD Laboratory's

surveillance contribution as a sentinel lab for the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as the State of Wisconsin for over the last 25 years.

"We value our partnership with the City of Milwaukee Health Department in the identification, tracking and treatment protocol for infectious diseases, including influenza," said Dr. Carolyn Smith, senior physician at Marquette's Student Health Service. "Working together we offer the Milwaukee community a strong early detection system, and we value this continued collaboration."

Both Student Health Services have been outstanding in their dedication to early detection of influenza viruses in the Milwaukee community. This program has also been useful for tracking other important virus outbreaks such as the rubella outbreak in 1977, measles outbreak in 1989 and mumps virus outbreaks in the 1980s and this past year. MU and UWM have relatively young student populations that are susceptible to many viruses, in addition the populations are highly mobile so many disease causing agents circulating in the community will spread through the campuses very rapidly. These populations are ideal for influenza virus surveillance.

"Because UWM is both a discrete community as well as part of the larger Milwaukee community, surveillance along with other public health efforts in this environment can serve a larger public health role," said Dr. Julie Bonner, UWM Director of Norris Health Center. "We are honored to be receiving this award and look forward to an expanded partnership in the future with the City of Milwaukee Health Department."

Each year, from August through April, the MHD Laboratory conducts influenza surveillance. This partnership with local universities provides a better understanding of the respiratory viruses present in Milwaukee, and how long various influenza virus strains circulate throughout the community.

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